



PHOTOS BY BEN BLOKER/Stars and Stripes

Karter Aransmeyer enjoys taking crayons out and putting them back in their box during craft time at the HUGS playgroup held in the Pulaski Kid's Zone on Thursday. HUGS — "Helping Us Grow Securely" — is a playgroup led by social workers from the New Parent Education and Support Program.

HUGS for toddlers and parents, too

Pulaski Barracks program offers fun, games and social support systems for young families

BY BEN BLOKER

Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN,
Germany

Stay-at-home moms they're not.

Every Thursday, nearly 100 moms and kids head to the Kid's Zone at Pulaski Barracks for some serious play time.

The main goal of the play group — known as Helping Us Grow Securely, or "HUGS" — is to provide socialization for children, according to Jeanne Jahosky, a social worker with the New Parent Education and Support Program.

During 90-minute gatherings, social workers like Jahosky lead parents and kids through crafts, songs and playtime.

"It gets them out of the house to do something fun," Jahosky said. "It also builds a social support system for the parents."

Through laughter and smiles, it was clear the kids were enjoying the playtime. The parents seemed to be enjoying it, too.

Tamra Aransmeyer, the mother of 20-month-old Karter, said her favorite part of the play group is talking with moms while the kids get to play.

"It's also very safe since all the kids are under 4 (years old)," she said.

The Kid's Zone is a large indoor playground with arcades, open spaces for running, prizes and pizza.

"It's relaxing for me," said Demetria Bennett as her 14-month-old daughter, Alanna, climbed through a jungle gym. "She runs free and is not attached to me."



Social worker Jeanne Jahosky leads songs at the HUGS playgroup in the Pulaski Kid's Zone on Thursday.

In addition to the play group, parents or expecting parents can request a support program social worker for home visits to discuss parenting or pregnancy concerns. At that point, parents can get help in areas ranging from managing stress and disciplining children to nutrition.

The voluntary program, available for family members with children under the age of 4 or pregnant mothers, is part of the Army Community Service. A smaller HUGS play group is held every Tuesday at Landstuhl.

E-mail Ben Bloker at:
blokerb@estripes.osd.mil